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Viewing cable 05PARIS7352, FRENCH MFA READOUT ON CHAVEZ VISIT, COLOMBIA, AND

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| Reference ID | Created | Released | Classification | Origin |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 05PARIS7352 | 2005-10-27 11:12 | 2011-08-30 01:44 | CONFIDENTIAL | Embassy Paris |

Appears in these articles:

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This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

id: 43788
date: 10/27/2005 11:12
refid: 05PARIS7352
origin: Embassy Paris
classification: CONFIDENTIAL
destination: 05PARIS5211|05PARIS7124|05STATE192336
header:

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 007352

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/26/2015
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [FR](#) [VE](#) [BL](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: FRENCH MFA READOUT ON CHAVEZ VISIT, COLOMBIA, AND
BOLIVIA STATEMENT

REF: A. STATE 192336
[1](#)B. PARIS 7124
[1](#)C. PARIS 5211

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: MFA DAS-equivalent for South America provided a frank and unapologetic readout October 24 of French policy toward Venezuela and the recent visit of President Chavez. The MFA highlighted France's economic interests in Venezuela, downplayed concerns about human rights, regional stability, and arms purchases, and professed to view Bolivian elections with more concern than those to take place in Venezuela. According to the MFA, GoF strategy is to act discretely to steer Chavez to act responsibly and to counsel prudence rather than confrontation. The one exception is on Iran, where FM Douste-Blazy delivered a strong message to FM Rodriguez Araque warning against dealings with Iran given its interest in acquiring nuclear technology. The MFA said it was only interested for the moment in selling spare parts for French-origin equipment already in Venezuela but hinted at an interest in other arms sales.

12. (C) Separately, the MFA affirmed that the French agreed in substance with the Bolivia Support Group text, but indicated it would await and support an EU statement. End Summary.

13. (U) Deputy Political Counselor and Poloff met October 24 with MFA DAS-equivalent for South America Michel Pinard and Venezuela Desk Officer Lionel Paradisi to seek a readout of Venezuelan President Chavez's October 21-22 visit to Paris and his meetings with President Chirac as well as Foreign Minister Rodriguez's meetings with French FM Douste-Blazy. They also raised ref A demarche on the Bolivia Support Group statement.

France's Economic Interests

14. (C) Pinard highlighted at the outset extensive French economic interests in Venezuela, adding that Chavez had met with a broad array of public and private sector representatives in order to encourage increased French engagement in Venezuela. Chavez, he said, was seeking to diversify its partners in the oil industry and had met toward that end with Total, which already has a 5 billion USD investment in Venezuela. Other discussions focused on possible French involvement in the transport sector, social housing, and student exchanges (Colombian students in France number 1800, as opposed to only 200 French students in Venezuela). Pinard indicated that the situation in Haiti had been discussed in the context of Chavez's Petro-Caribbean initiative; queried by Deputy PolCouns whether France had any concerns about Venezuelan use of oil diplomacy, Pinard characterized it as completely beneficial, arguing that Haiti was not a country likely to become Chaviste or Bolivarian in its outlook simply because of oil provided at favorable prices. Pinard nonetheless asserted that French associate membership in the Amazonian Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) on November 24 would provide a useful balancing factor. The only critical note was Pinard's acknowledgment that the GoF had counseled Chavez on the need for judicial guaranties for companies to preserve international investment.

Chavez Here to Stay

15. (C) Pinard noted that he recently met with a member of the Venezuelan NGO Sumate and had carefully listened to that organization's concerns about human rights and democracy in Venezuela. However, he characterized Sumate essentially as an oppositionist political organization. The problem with the opposition, Pinard continued, was that it lacked organization and provided no real alternative or direction; moreover, the various opposition groups were united only in their opposition to Chavez. Pinard downplayed our concerns about human rights and civil society, stating that, while France remained watchful of the situation, it saw no reason for immediate alarm. He dismissed Chavez's famed revolutionary speeches as mere rhetorical fireworks that were part of the region's political traditions, and said there was no real threat behind the rhetoric.

Colombia a Bigger Problem

16. (C) Pinard expressed GoF frustration that the Uribe government in Bogota had not been able to achieve greater progress in its efforts to secure a humanitarian exchange of prisoners with the FARC. This was a French priority that included private GoF interactions with the FARC, Pinard said. If the Israelis could negotiate with Hizbollah for a prisoner exchange, he reasoned, then Colombia should be able to do the same with the FARC. Pinard indicated that the French had asked for Venezuelan help in passing messages to both the Uribe government and the FARC to press them to seek a military accord that would allow for the humanitarian exchange of prisoners. The FARC posed a problem for Venezuela as well, Pinard said, given its activities along the border. Pinard said he knew that there were some in the Venezuelan government who, despite their claims that they were no longer associated with the FARC, still had ways of communicating with the organization. It was through these channels that Pinard hoped to have the Venezuelans press the FARC to come to the bargaining table with the Colombian government.

Kid Gloves, Except on Iran

17. (C) Chavez was skilled in using international criticism of his regime to his domestic political advantage, according to Pinard. As a result, the French approach was one that privileged discrete counsel to Chavez over open criticism or confrontation. Comments like those made recently by Pat Robertson (despite his position as simply a private citizen)

only played into Chavez's hands, Pinard argued. When queried, Pinard said that only on Iran had the French delivered a strong message to Chavez. Specifically, French Foreign Minister Douste-Blazy had been clear with his Venezuelan counterpart, Ali Rodriguez Araque, that Iranian pursuit of nuclear military weapons capability was unacceptable.

Arms Sales

18. (C) Asked directly whether the French, like Russia and Spain, were interested in arms sales to Venezuela, Pinard acknowledged that the subject had arisen. Venezuela currently has 1960's-era French tanks, Mirage fighters, and older model helicopters, according to Pinard, and France was interested in supplying spare parts and refurbishing the equipment. Asked again directly whether France was interested in the sale of more modern equipment, Pinard initially protested that "Venezuela is not interested in buying the Rafael," but then conceded that the general subject of future arms sales had been raised, although this was an issue the French would have to study. Pinard was categorical that Chavez's arms acquisitions were not a threat to his neighbors, however, as Pinard was convinced that Chavez could have no possible interest in an external war. When Deputy PolCouns rejoined that arms build-ups were, at a minimum, instruments of influence, Pinard speculated that Chavez was more concerned with managing Venezuela's internal situation. Pinard argued that purchases of heavy arms were intended primarily to placate bored generals, whose support Chavez needed internally; he nonetheless conceded that this would also give Chavez more clout within South America. Asked about light arms, such as the Kalishnakovs being purchased from Russia, Pinard suggested they had less to do with arming a population against external forces than with arming Chavez supporters to put down any internal insurrection.

EU Observers in Venezuela, Support for Elections in Bolivia

19. (C) When asked about French support for EU observers in upcoming Venezuelan elections, Pinard indicated that he did not know what decision Brussels had reached, but that the GoF recognized a potential need for election observers, "although the only risk would be in the margin of victory by which Chavez would win." Pinard argued that it was in fact more important to send observers to Bolivia, where the results of elections were less than certain. In response to ref A points (provided on October 17), Pinard stated that the GoF fully agreed in substance with the statement of the Bolivia Support Group. However, for reasons of bureaucratic form, the GoF is waiting for the EU statement. Again citing bureaucratic technicalities, Pinard did not know if EU observers would be possible for Bolivian elections (he implied that the system of EU allotments might force it to abandon observation of elections at another location), but indicated that he believed it was important to have a presence there.

Comment

10. (C) France sees no downside for now in pushing its economic interests over human rights and other considerations, especially since U.S.-Venezuelan tensions offer possibilities for new sales. We thus can expect the French to continue to pursue investment and arms sales opportunities. French toughness on Iran is more a reflection of its own involvement in the EU3 negotiations than its concerns about Venezuela per se. The only surprise was just how warmly Chavez seems to have been welcomed. Pinard attributed this to a friendship that has developed between members of the GoF and Chavez, as well as genuine appreciation for Venezuelan assistance following the deaths of 162 French passengers of an airliner that crashed in Venezuela over the summer. There are also personal factors: Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin spent part of his childhood in Venezuela, and Chavez's back-slapping, "Caribbean" expansiveness is a match for Chirac's, according to Pinard.

11. (C) French attitudes towards Colombia and Venezuela seem mirror images of U.S. views. GoF attempts to bring Venezuela into Colombian negotiations with the FARC are disturbing, and appear to be driven almost entirely by the GoF's focus on the captivity of Franco-Colombian Ingrid Betancourt. The presence of Chirac at an October 24 solidarity concert for Betancourt, Villepin's personal involvement in a failed 2003 attempt to negotiate her release, and the reported civil union of MFA A/S-equivalent for the Americas Daniel Parfait to Betancourt's sister auger poorly for any real change in French policy until the situation is resolved. End Comment. Please visit Paris' Classified Website at:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

Hofmann

=====CABLE ENDS=====